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Helmut Dietl, Carlos Gomez-Gonzalez, and Cornel Nesseler

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University of Zurich, Plattenstrasse 14, CH-8053 Zurich,
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Contact Details

Cornel Nesseler

University of Zurich

Department of Business Adminstration

Plattenstrasse 14., CH-8032 Zurich, Switzerland

Cornel.Nesseler@business.uzh.ch

Tel.: +41 44 634 53 13

Fax.: +41 44 634 53 29

Carlos Gomez-Gonzalez

University of Castilla-La Mancha

Facultad Derecho y CC. Sociales

Ronda de Toledo ,s/n., 13071 Ciudad Real, Spain

Carlos.Gomez@uclm.es

Tel.: +34 925 268 800

Are women or men better team managers?

Evidence from professional team sports

Helmut M. Ditel

University of Zurich

Carlos Gomez Gonzalez

University of Castilla-La Mancha

Cornel Nesseler

University of Zurich

We empirically compare the performance of female and male team managers. We find that female team managers never perform worse than male team managers and that females work under significantly worse conditions than males. Additionally, we find that specialized experience has no influence. Special-

ized experience means having worked previously as an employee in the same industry. Our dataset consists of female and male managers in women soccer leagues acroos countries, viz., France, Germany, and Norway. Managers in team sports usually have exactly the same tasks (selection, coordination, and motivation of team members) as team managers in other industries. The limited number of women in top management positions in some of these industries and the lack of available data do not often allow comparisons. Our study, which includes a fair number of female team managers and a clear measurement of performance, can help understanding stereotypical behaviors. Therefore, our results have important implications for industries, companies, and clubs who oppose employing female team managers.

JEL classification: J16, J7, L83

Keywords: Performance, Female managers, discrimination, Working conditions

1 Introduction

In most industries, companies employ teams to perform tasks. For example R&D teams create and develop new products and services, marketing teams are responsible for selling new and existing products, and production teams optimize plant operations. These

teams consist of several team members and a team manager. The team manager in a business environment is responsible, to some extent, for the team formation (e.g., hiring and laying off employees), communication (e.g., managing goals and mission of a team), and training (e.g., improving the employees skill set).

In our analysis we define sports coaches as team managers and players as team members. A team manager in sports is, similar to team managers in other industries, responsible for the performance of the team. The selection, supervision, and training of team members, as well as devising tactics and communicating with media define the remit of team sports managers (Goddard and Sloane 2014). As the responsibilities of managers and team leaders are similar, numerous authors make this connection (Clark 1999; Ladyshewsky 2010; Marsh 1992).

The representation of female team managers in European professional sports leagues (Hovden 2013), North American intercollegiate sports (Acosta and Carpenter 2014), or Australian national sports organizations (Adriaanse 2016) is very limited and often negative (Gregory, 2009). Some European women soccer leagues, the tennis Fed Cup and Hopman Cup are examples of sports competitions employing a significant number of female team managers. We examine if this limited representation is simply due to differences in performance and whether professional clubs employ fewer fe-

male managers because they simply perform worse.

We analyze the performance across countries in Europe. We therefore use the three top European women soccer leagues (France, Germany, and Norway). This dataset allows us to avoid most of the shortcomings that papers analyzing the performance of female and male team managers report.

Our study contributes an accurate measure of performance to the existing literature on gender differences between female and male team managers. Our dataset also allows us to measure the skill set of the team members, which is sometimes impossible in other sectors, and include the specialized experience of managers. In addition, we are able to compare team managers within the same sector and avoid biases that may appear when comparing teams performing in different sectors. Finally, our empirical analysis allows us to argue that the under-representation of female team managers in this context is not due to performance differences. Likewise, we find that female team managers work under significant worse conditions than their male counterparts.

2 Literature Review

Because leading and managing teams to be successful is an important task a substantial amount of research on the different aspects

of team management exists. Several authors examine team management to improve surgical procedures (Friedland et al. 2011; Stephens et al. 2006), to increase revenue in large corporations (Ahern and Dittmar 2012; Deszö and Ross 2008; Erhardt et al. 2003), or to improve the performance of nongovernmental organizations (Lindenberg 2001; Smillie and Hailey 2001). This is a brief compendium of the extensive literature analyzing team management.

Many studies that analyze differences between female and male team managers have shortcomings when measuring their performance: First, researchers use the stock market to analyze companies' performance across different sectors. These analyses share the drawback that the whole company represents one team. It is unreasonable to assume that a team manager's performance is visible for a team consisting of a very large number of team members or multiple teams. The authors also base their theoretic work on the efficient market hypothesis which has been criticized by numerous authors (Basu 1977; Fama 1998; Shiller 2000). For other areas (e.g., medicine or NGO's), it is equally difficult to measure team performance.

Second, many studies face difficulties when assessing the talent and skills of individual team members (e.g., surgeons or employees in NGO's), who have an important influence on teams' perfor-

mance. Most ignore these problems by omitting individual performance.

Third, most authors neglect or do not specify the experience of team managers. Tesluk and Jacobs (1998) argue that the specification of the experience source is important because the context in which experience is gained might have an influence on performance. Several researchers examine that the education of team managers significantly correlates with the outcome of teams and companies.

Finally, several authors compare companies or teams from different sectors or industries (e.g., Elsaid and Ursel 2011; Erhardt et al. 2003; Kalleberg and Leicht 1991; Khan and Vieito 2013; Post and Byron 2015; Wolfers 2006). However, the economic or general conditions for teams differ significantly from sector to sector. For example, while most sectors have to cope with a significant loss of demand during an economic downturn, many companies have unchanged or increased demand for their products (Dave and Kelly 2012; Smith et al. 2014).

The sports industry, which is under-examined in the team management literature, provides us with an ideal scenario for four reasons: First, we have an exact measurement of team performance - points per game. This variable is important because it determines the success of team managers. Points per game in a league defines

the success of teams.

Second, we have sufficient information to measure the skill set of team members. In other contexts, it is difficult to measure the skill set of team members. Nonetheless, the team members play an important part in the final performance. In our data we distinguish between high- and low-ranked national players, players receiving individual performance awards, and players skills' when they join a team.

Third, we compare teams in the same sector (e.g., basketball, soccer). Teams competing in the same league face the same opponents and work under similar conditions. Thus, the use of sports data allows us to avoid comparisons between companies in different sectors.

Finally, we examine and specify the previous experience of team managers in the sports industry. We can identify managers who were previously professional players. Previous experience is valuable experience for managers because they also had to compete in a similar professional environment. While being professional players, they also receive specialized experience in, for example, technical or physical training. This personal experience, is a valuable asset for future sports managers. Gaining experience as a professional player in sports is similar to receiving specialized education and training in other industries.

Many researchers examine the under-representation of female team coaches (Bracken 2009; Walker and Bopp 2011). Furthermore, the lack of role models (Avery et al. 2008), gender based barriers (Oakley, 2000; Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2008), or self-efficacy issues (Cunningham et al. 2007) are often identified as obstructions for females. On the other hand, research suggests that while females in sports suffer from a negative connotation, males can use their experience as an advantage (Knoppers, 2011).

However, no research examined whether women team managers underperform when compared to male team managers under similar conditions in the same sector. Negative reactions and attitudes towards women in management positions are rational only if evidence exists supporting the notion that female team managers underperform when compared to their male counterparts. Because team managers in sports and other industries share similar responsibilities (e.g., selection, supervision, coordination, motivation of team members), our results provide new evidence regarding gender differences in performance in management positions.

3 Theoretical implications

Several researchers examine performance differences for male and female managers. Some studies find no significant differences;

Kalleberg and Leicht (1991) analyze small business holders, and Deszö and Ross (2008) and Wolfers (2006) observe diversity in CEO positions for S&P 1500 companies. Others find female participation in the board of directors to have a positive influence. Campbell and Minguez-Vera (2008) examine companies in Spain, Smith et al. (2006) in the Danish stock market, and Post and Byron (2015) perform a meta analysis of numerous studies analyzing accounting returns.

All previously mentioned papers use financial outcomes (e.g., Tobin's Q) to assess the performance of female and male managers. However, these measures are influenced by many other factors and do not completely incorporate the managerial influence (Kulik and Metz 2015). The sports dataset in our study allows us to include a performance measure (i.e., game victories) that is more closely associated with managerial decisions.

The literature highlights that female managers act differently than their male counterparts and possess unique perspectives that influence group operations (Kulik and Metz 2015). Stoker et al. (2012) find that female employees have a stronger preference for women in management positions, which also influence the performance of a team. However, the positive influence of these unique characteristics on final performance outcomes is not obvious in the literature; researchers find ambiguous results. Organizational out-

comes (e.g., social responsibility, internal group processes, or determined management practices) could be improved with females in management positions (Kulik and Metz 2015), but the final outcome might not differ much. Researchers consider, in general, females' transformational management style to be effective in most organizations.

However, this effect could be diminished in a sports organization. For example, senior female players whose opinions weigh heavily on teams' decision processes and strategies can provide teams with the unique "female" perspective. The combination of female senior players and male coaches is an heterogeneous group that could work similarly to a mixed directory board. Therefore, we cannot assume that the gender of the manager is per se an advantage for teams or organizations:

Hypothesis 1: Female and male managers do not outperform each other.

Leadership styles of female managers may not result in significantly better final outcomes compared with male managers. However, the glass cliff literature shows how female managers are often appointed in more risky and precarious positions (Ryan and Haslam 2005).

We contribute to this literature by analyzing the preconditions of team managers in their workplace (i.e., quality of players available, previous performance of the team, and other contextual factors). We show that the glass cliff phenomenon also plays a role in sports organizations. Because of sports cycles (i.e., senior player retirements, financial crisis, losses of sponsors, etc.), teams end up in difficult situations in which inexperienced or low profile players have to outperform. In such a scenario, it is likely that, just as in any other organization, owners prefer to hire female managers who are more risk averse. Moreover, women are perceived as capable of providing teams with communication channels (Melero 2011) and a more democratic and participative spirit (Dezsö and Ross 2012), which are determinants in the absence of high profile team members. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Female team managers work under worse preconditions than their male counterparts.

The positive effect of the education of managers on the performance of companies is generally accepted in the literature (Bhagat et al. 2010; Jalbert et al. 2002). However, conceptual education programs often fail to promote the development of practical skills

required of managers in the labor market.

4 Study Overview

We examine three top European women soccer leagues. The leagues in France, Germany, and Norway are three of the five largest women soccer leagues in Europe with respect to total budget for women's soccer (UEFA 2014). Women managers have frequently worked in these leagues in the early 2000's. However, in all three leagues, the percentage of women managers has sharply declined since 2008 (i.e., France 27% in 2008 to 9% in 2014, Germany 33% in 2008 to 8% in 2014, and Norway 36% in 2008 to 18% in 2014).

Soccer is a team sport in which two teams with 11 players try to score more goals (getting the ball into the opposing goal) than the opponent to win the game. Games consist of 90 minutes (2 periods of 45 minutes) with a 15-minute half-time break. A soccer team receives three points for a win, one for a draw, and zero for a loss. For additional information regarding soccer rules see FIFA (2015). These leagues are ideal because a significant amount of data is publicly available (for France since 2004 and for Germany and Norway since 2000). We use these leagues to explore if females with and without specialized experience (i.e., being former professional players) perform differently compared to males with-

out specialized experience.

4.1 Data

Our data comes from various sources. For league statistics (i.e., rank, name, and age of the team manager; player of the year; and game attendance) we use data from transfermarkt.com (authors using the same source are e.g., Hardman and Iorwerth 2014; Lee et al. 2014; Parsons and Rohde 2015). For older data many observations about name and age of the manager were missing. Therefore, we contacted the soccer clubs or the appropriate federation directly. We had to omit approximately 0.5% of the data because either the gender or the age of the manager was unclear or untraceable. Unfortunately, no reliable information about the management experience was available. We use the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) for data about aggregate team information (national team ranking).

As a primary outcome variable for performance we choose if a team wins a game *Game result*. This is the most complete measurement available to approach teams' success; it is comparable to companies' performance. Several authors identify points per game as the focal point for professional team sports clubs (e.g., Dietl et al. 2009; Késenne 1996; Vrooman 1995). Thus, using the winning percentage after every game is an approximation for points

per game.

To account for teams' budgets we include game attendance, people living in a close area, and playing talent. We include *Attendance* to measure the average number of people attending a home game in a season. As this number might be restricted by the people living close to a club, we also control for the *total population who has the possibility to attend a game in a 10 kilometer radius* (cf. Buraimo and Simmons 2009; Forrest et al. 2002). Game attendance is an important source of revenue for clubs because supporters pay an entrance fee. We summarize game attendance and people living close by in *Attendance*.

In several models for professional team sports leagues, playing talent is the most important expenditure for the budget of a team (Dietl et al. 2009; Madden 2011). Therefore, our aim is to clearly differentiate between the players in a league to measure their skill set.

Naturally, national team managers try to choose the best players for their teams. Accordingly, we distinguish between players who play for a national team and those who do not. We use the FIFA national ranking to detect if players are playing for a high- or low-ranked national team. In this ranking the performance of a national team is evaluated and compared with all other national teams. To clearly assess the number and skills of international

players, we divide the FIFA ranking into four categories and identify the number of players in a team playing in these categories. Thus, we introduce the variables *national players from Top 10, Top 11-20, Top 21-30 and Top 31-200 FIFA ranked nations*.

To further assess the skill set of players we observe if a player is voted as the *best player of the year*. This variable is useful to detect playing talent which might not be visible in the FIFA ranking.

For managers we define specialized experience as having played in the highest soccer league (being closest to a professional career). Thus, we have three groups in France: males and females without specialized experience and females with specialized experience. In Germany and in Norway not enough women managers without experience are working in those markets - thus we compare two groups: Females with specialized experience and males without specialized experience.

Additionally, we include *age* and *gender* of the managers. Table 1 gives an overview of all previously mentioned variables.

[Table 1 near here]

4.2 Analysis and Results

In Table 2 we show the results of the regression with robust standard errors. Our dependent variable is the game result. We ana-

lyze every country individually. First, we examine the impact of the manager without incorporating team or league variables for every country. Second, we include all team or league variables.

Table 2 shows three important results. First, no performance differences exist in any country after we include our control variables (viz., regressions 2,4, and 6). Thus, neither male nor female managers outperform each other.

Second, playing talent has an important significant effect on performance. We see that having a higher number of national players from a high ranked FIFA nation improves the chances to win a game. The effect of the playing talent decreases with lower ranked FIFA national players.

Third, game attendance has a positive impact on performance. Accordingly, having more supporters at a game increases the chances to win a game. Although the magnitude of the results is different in every country they have important implications in the following analysis.

[Table 2 near here]

To further analyze the data we examine the different preconditions of female and male managers using the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition (Table 4). To evaluate gender or group differences (e.g., between rich and poor citizens) the Oaxaca-Blinder decompo-

sition is frequently used in labor economics (e.g., Stanley and Jarrell 1998; Weichselbaumer and Winter-Ebmer 2005; Yun 2004). The decomposition divides the performance differences between male and female managers in unexplained and explained variation. The differences are explained with the explanatory variables. Practically speaking this means that we compare two groups and evaluate if they have different preconditions which influence their performance. Accordingly, in our case we examine if females and males have different/similar performance because of different/similar preconditions. A propensity score matching approach is also appropriate (for a more detailed discussion regarding the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition and propensity score matching see Kline (2011)).

[Table 3 near here]

Table 3 shows a short extract of the decomposition. We omit all insignificant effects as the analysis is otherwise too extensive. We perform the decomposition in accordance with the previous results. Thus, we observe the results at the country level. For France no significant difference for male and female managers exists. Both, explained and unexplained parts of the analysis only have a minor effect. For Germany a large difference between male and female managers is explainable through our data. The analysis shows

that female managers are younger, have a lower attendance at their games, and a lower amount of playing talent. However, a large amount is unexplainable with our data. For Norway a large difference between male and female managers is explainable through our data. Female managers are younger, have a lower amount of playing talent, and fewer people living in the vicinity of their club. Thus, if female managers in Germany and Norway had the same conditions as males they would significantly outperform male managers.

5 Discussion

We compare female managers, who were professional players in their previous career, with male and female managers who were not professional players. The results show that neither female managers nor male and female managers without comparable experience outperform each other. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 finds empirical support because female and male managers do not outperform each other. However, we find that female managers work under significantly worse conditions in two countries (Germany and Norway). Regarding the preconditions women and men encounter when managing their teams, we find support for Hypothesis 2. Female managers work under significantly worse preconditions than

male managers, which coincides with previous findings in the glass cliff literature.

Our research provides new empirical evidence regarding gender differences in performance between team managers. The results show no difference in performance between teams with experienced male or female team managers, similar to results found in previous studies that focus on females in CEO positions (Dezsö and Ross 2008; Wolfers 2006). Additionally, the European soccer case demonstrates that specialized experience has no effect. These results reject the notion that a positive correlation exists between women with specialized experience in management positions and performance (Smith et al. 2006). Previous researchers focus on analyzing differences in performance when a company has a woman in a management position; many of them use the stock market to compare companies in several sectors. In most sectors, demand and labor fluctuation are divergent, which makes it considerably difficult to use the stock market as a reference point across sectors. Many researchers have been criticized for focusing on the efficient market hypothesis (e.g., Fama 1998; Shiller 2000). To avoid this criticism we use a specific and widely accepted benchmark as the dependent variable (i.e., game result), which allows us to accurately assess team performance. Our study is independent of the stock market. Additionally, in contrast to other researchers

studying the effect of gender on team performance (e.g., Erhardt et al. 2003; Khan and Vieito 2013; Wolfers 2006), our study focuses on teams in the same sector, avoiding seasonal demand issues that appear when comparing multiple sectors.

Additionally, we contribute to the literature by including specialized experience (i.e., having worked as employee in the same industry). We find mixed evidence regarding specialized experience. In France, female managers with specialized experience perform equally well as females and males with specialized experience. In Germany and Norway neither gender outperform each other. However, females with specialized experience work under significantly worse conditions than males. Thus, if they had the same conditions they would significantly outperform their male counterparts.

For female managers to continuously receive employment they have to perform at least as good as males or even better. When they receive employment with worse conditions than males they have to outperform males to be considered as equally good as males. However, not all female managers can always outperform males. As performance is crucial for companies (cf., Becker, 2010) they only employ female managers as long as they are certain that they perform at least equally well as other potential candidates. Thus, females that perform equally well as males are driven out of the market. Only outperforming females receive employment.

[Figure 1 near here]

Our explanation fits to the current development. Many researchers examine the under-representation of female team coaches (Bracken 2009; Walker and Bopp, 2011). A similar development is visible in the countries which we analyse. In Norway the number of female managers is stable (Figure 1). However, the number of female managers in both France and Germany significantly decreased since 2000. We expect this number to further decrease because female managers work under significantly worse conditions and accordingly have to outperform male managers to stay in the labor market.

6 Limitations and Future Research

Our work is severely limited by the number of observations in the analysis. For the European soccer leagues we gathered data over a 15-year period (2000 - 2015). A larger dataset would further clarify the results of numerous explanatory variables. Due to the limited dataset, it is not possible to construct a sensible model with a longer time lag.

Missing data, especially the age and gender of some managers, exacerbate the problem of working with a small dataset. Unfortunately, no other soccer leagues in Europe provide a better dataset

since female managers are under-represented in all other leagues. Additionally, the lack of publicly available information limits the sample size.

In our analysis all team members are the same gender, i.e., all players are women. Thus, we have a somewhat distorted view of teams. In many cases, teams consist of both men and women. Unfortunately, we cannot incorporate a mixed-teams competition (i.e., Hopman Cup) in our analysis due to the lack of available data.

A more complete dataset would include a better measurement of the quality of the players (e.g., the budget of the clubs). However, budget is not available in our study. Although our variables manage to explain part of the budget, an unknown portion of the budget still remains unexplained. Thus, other explanatory variables have to fill this gap in the future (e.g., value of machinery and real estate a company holds).

Finding a more direct approach to measure how either a female or a male team manager impacts the performance of a company is an interesting question for future research. While we use a quantitative method to assess performance, future research could use a qualitative approach to investigate the influence of team managers' performance on employees (e.g., through extensive surveys). Additionally, female and male team managers could have a different impact depending on the size and composition of teams.

7 Conclusion

Our analysis, using data from professional team sports leagues, shows that female team managers do not underperform when compared to male team managers. Additionally, we find that females work under significantly worse conditions than male managers. Because only competitive managers receive employment we expect the number of female managers to further decrease in the future.

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